**Using *The Important Book* Across Content Areas**

Source: <http://corbettharrison.com/lessons/Important-Passages.htm>

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| **a processing task that's great for writing across the curriculum: Superlative Paragraphs  Prioritizing Facts with *Important Book* Passages**  **Overview of this Notebook Prompt:**  This notebook prompt teaches students a format for summarizing or processing learning that can be used when producing writing in all curriculum areas: an*Important Book*passage, which I call a *superlative paragraph* in my classroom .  Inspired by Margaret Wise Brown's classic picture book, [**The Important Book**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0064432270?ie=UTF8&tag=writi-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0064432270), students practice a format for writing an organized paragraph that "puts in their own words" new facts they've recently learned; more importantly, they learn to prioritize their thinking and express that prioritization while thinking about this grammatical term: *superlatives*.  There are a lot of lessons out there that rely on this mentor text, and I have to say, most of them I don't find very creative; mainly, other lessons focus too much on teaching the structured nature of*Important Book* passages, and when you do that, I believe you lose something. So I tried to build this lesson so that it would spark my students creativity by giving them the safety of the frame for writing but permission to think outside the frame too.  Also, I'm a true believer that grammar and grammmatical terms should be taught "in context," which means--rather than through lecture and a practice worksheet--students apply grammatical terms to a piece of original writing they are creating for my class. Research stresses this is a more effective approach in helping students apply and remember lessons about grammar...and punctuation too. This lesson focuses on learning about superlatives in context. | **My mentor text for this lesson:** [http://corbettharrison.com/images/lesson_images/Important-Book.jpg](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0064432270?ie=UTF8&tag=writi-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0064432270) [**The Important Book**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0064432270?ie=UTF8&tag=writi-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0064432270) by Margaret Wise Brown |
| **Interacting with the Mentor Text:**  Can you believe there are still teachers out there who don't know about The Important Book? That fact still amazes me. If you are one of those teachers, you really should get a classroom copy. My annual introduction of this well-known mentor text begins when I am ready to teach my students to move beyond "hamburger paragaphs." My goal as a writing teacher is to teach my students how to move from structured paragraphs to paragraphs that do not rely on a format at all. A true paragraph, I've always said, should achieve*a purpose*, not a formula; however, I'm a good enough writing teacher to say that before students can write formula-less paragraphs, they have to learn what a paragraph is, how to organize it, and most of my kids require a structure to do this.*Important Book* passages are structured but not as structured as a hamburger paragraph, so it's one step away from relying on a paragraph frame.  http://corbettharrison.com/images/lesson_images/important-book-poster.jpgI actually start teaching *Important Book* passages in the fall; in April, when I teach the lesson on this page, we have actually moved past these passages and are writing paragraphs that are mostly un-structured, but I bring this format for writing back for students to use in their writer's notebooks. Between the fall and the spring, I also add the element of thinking about perspective to their*Important Book* passages, which I explain below.  In The Important Book, Margaret Wise Brown--a poet--describes items (rain, wind, apples, etc.) to the reader from her poetic point-of-view. Each page focuses on a different item, but each page uses the same formula to describe the item. Her first sentence (see poster at left from my teacher-friend Amy Harbarger's wall) starts with the words "The important thing about [item] is..." She then describes other relevant details about the item using her poetic perspective. She concludes each page with a reminder: "But the important thing about [item] is [a repeat of the first sentence]." This is a nice little formula that, as said, can be easily used by students.  What I focus students on when sharing and imitating these passages is that the author, I believe, has truly selected what she believes is*the most important poetic element* to begin and end her passages with. The discussion of each passage, in my classroom, always includes these two questions: "Why do you think she has chosen this as*the most important* element of the item? If you, as a person who perhaps isn't as poetic as the author, had to express what you believe the most important element is, would you select something different and why?"  When you start putting the word *most* in front of the word *important*, it opens up a whole discussion about *perspective* and *superlatives*. Completing a straight-forward *Important Book* passage is fairly easy, but being able to justify your choice of the most important thing opens the possibilities for having deep, cognitive discussions. Students will (hopefully) disagree with one another if writing passages about the same topic. Students will (hopefully) disagree with Margaret Wise Brown's perspective as a poet as they consider her chosen*most important* element. I want that kind of rich discussion among my students.  Just to illustrate how rich the discussions can become of this mentor text's passages, consider the page where she talks about *rain*. Margaret Wise Brown decided the most important element of *rain*is that it is *wet*. That's her poetic opinion, which I can certainly see. To throw a perspective-inspired challenge at my students, I ask:   * What would a meteorologist say is the most important thing about rain? * What would a Dust Bowl farmer say is the most important thing about rain? * What would someone living in a flood plain say is the most important thing about rain?   And suddenly, perspective adds a whole new element to our*Important Book* passages, which I find many teachers find a refreshing new twist on using this mentor text. I challenge you to come up with perspective questions (like my bullets above) for the other pages in Margaret Wise Brown's original text. It's actually fun.  And then, I challenge you to start requiring your students to write these passages from another's perspective as well as their own.  [**Back to the *Top of the Page \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***](http://corbettharrison.com/lessons/Important-Passages.htm#top)  **A Quick Note about Superlatives:**  [[http://corbettharrison.com/images/lesson_images/Superlative2.jpg](http://writingfix.com/Picture_Book_Prompts/PunctuationTakesVacation1.htm)](http://writingfix.com/Picture_Book_Prompts/PunctuationTakesVacation1.htm)I love throwing grammatical terms at my students when we are in the midst of a writing task. *Superlatives* and*Important Book* passages go hand-in-hand. If you've not taught superlatives before, here's my explanation:  A superlative is a type of adjective that is made in one of three ways:   * If you take many adjectives--*great*, for example--you can add -er and -est to them. The *-est* version is actually the *superlative*. * If you add the word *most* or *least* in front of the adjective, you are speaking in superlatives too. There is no word "importantest" so you have to say "most important." It's important to note that "least important" is also a superlative. * Some words' superlative forms are irregular: for example, *good*, *better*, and *best* (as opposed to *gooder* and *goodest*).   As you teach/assign*Important Book* passages, use the word *superlative* a lot. Make the students use the word; make them point out their superlative ideas in their own passages. When you require students to use the academic language with you and with each other, you are verbally scaffolding them to better remember the meaning and application of your academic vocabulary.  The picture at right is from the "Conventional Superhero Family" page I created in my Writer's Notebook. You can access the entire lesson (which was created for WritingFix by my fellow NNWP Consultant--Courtney Hurlburt--and I added a Writer's Notebook page to it) by clicking [**here**](http://writingfix.com/Picture_Book_Prompts/PunctuationTakesVacation1.htm) or on the picture.  [**Back to the *Top of the Page \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***](http://corbettharrison.com/lessons/Important-Passages.htm#top) | |